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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the life of William Torrey Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education 1889-1906, and his involvement in the development and organization of the National Education Association (NEA). Born in 1835, Harris's schooling consisted of many "fresh starts" which began with enthusiasm but were never completed. In 1857 Harris traveled to St. Louis, secured a teaching position, and eventually became the superintendent of schools. After 12 years he retired rather than risk being forced out. Nine years later Harris was appointed Commissioner of Education. Although he had been active in the NEA since 1870, it was not until after 1889 that he became a dominating power. For fifteen years Harris, Nicholas Murray Butler, and a few allies controlled the association. The exclusiveness of this inner circle was apparent by 1890. Their self-perpetuating character and domination of the nominations for NEA offices led to charges that the NEA was being run by and for a small clique of insiders. As opposition increased, Harris was forced to resign; this act led to reform in the NEA. (Author/JK)

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THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD:
WILLIAM TORREY HARRIS AND THE PASSING OF THE OLD ORDER IN THE NEA

By L. Glenn Smith

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When Iowa educator James Enos adjourned the day-long Philadelphia meeting of forty-one men and two women organizers of the new National Teachers Association in late August 1857, internal contradictions were already firmly in place. The Association was to include "all practical teachers" from North, South, East, and West, but women could not join. They could be honorary members and present essays so long as the secretary or some other gentleman member read them. They were also allowed to listen to the gentlemen discuss their papers.[1] While this "great educational brotherhood" would depend upon a small group of educational administrators for its government and leadership, it would encourage hope for large attendance at annual conventions to pay the annual dues so the proceedings could be printed and the bills paid. Women teachers were especially useful in this respect.[2]

When President Zalmon Richards opened the group's first real convention in Cincinnati during the summer of 1858, he found he could not proceed without working a little deception. Of the more than two hundred assembled teachers, only four people besides him were members. He planted three of these at strategic spots in the auditorium and put the secretary (J. W. Bulkley) on the platform. After the welcome messages were spoken, one of the "plants" moved that the secretary read the constitution and the president explain the organization. A second member stood and moved that an opportunity be given for those who were not members to join. Richards named the third member (Cincinnati Superintendent, A. J. Rickoff) treasurer, and seventy-five new members paid their dues.[3] Fifty years later dissident teachers would charge that the only thing the leadership of the NEA wanted was their money, and that various ruses

were still used to get it. Many teachers agreed with the sentiments of a New Jersey woman who said she saw no reason why teachers should "help to increase the funds of an association in which they receive only injustice."[4]

Such "injustices" and oligarchic policies had been inherent in the association since its inception. The discussion which follows gives the account tracing the organization from its inception, through the rise and fall of "the ring" rule.

Early Development

During its first dozen years, continued existence of the National Teachers Association was far from assured. The Civil War hurt and there were no meetings in 1861 or 62. However, by the summer of 1863 Chicago hosted the best attended annual convention up to that point. More than a thousand educators (some estimates said 2000) made the trip to Bryan Hall. As it turned out, the long speeches and stifling heat made the local sites more attractive than the meeting for most conventioneers, but membership temporarily reached a peak which would not be reached again until the 1870's.[5]

All of the ladies at the Chicago meeting were made honorary members. However, by the Indianapolis convention in 1866, pressure from women teachers forced a constitutional change – "person" was substituted for "gentleman" in the membership article. Three years later at the Trenton convention two women were elected to minor offices. Despite these concessions, the function of women members remained largely passive and decorative. For that matter few classroom teachers of either sex had any substantial part in directing the association.

In 1870 at Cleveland significant changes occurred which materially helped in guaranteeing future membership, without elevating the status of "practical teachers" in the group. The name was changed from National Teachers to National Educational Association. Three other organizations came on as departments: 1) the American Normal School Association, which had been organized in 1858 in Connecticut; 2) the National Association of School Superintendents, originating in Pennsylvania in 1865; and 3) the Department of Higher Education, an outgrowth of the Central College Association begun in Illinois in 1869. Everyone not identified with one of these three interests went into a newly created Department of Elementary Education. Membership quickly doubled in the NEA and remained relatively stable through the mid-1880's.[6]

The 1870 Cleveland meeting witnessed another beginning: a liaison between the NEA and the U.S. Bureau (Office) of Education.[7] This symbiosis would prove to be a key element in the domination of the NEA by a small group of men. The marriage began when Commissioner of Education John Eaton, Jr., was introduced with President Grant sitting approvingly in the audience. General Eaton (he had been breveted brigadier general in the war) credited the NEA with the Bureau's having come into existence and pledged the resources of his office to promoting the common cause of the two organizations. He needed the cooperation of the country's school officers to supply the data which Congress had directed his Bureau to collect. For the next sixteen years Eaton honored his pledge to aid the meetings and projects of the NEA. By the time he resigned as Commissioner of Education in 1886, the Bureau of Education was well respected in school circles, and the NEA had definitely emerged as the most influential

professional organization for people engaged in operating the country's schools. In 1886 before leaving Washington to become president of Marrieta College in Ohio, Eaton helped the organization secure a twenty-year charter in the District of Columbia.

All through the seventies and into the eighties the NEA rocked along. There was no surplus money. Indeed, special assessments were sometimes necessary to pay all the bills.[8] Annual meetings were generally pleasant, except when the convention site suffered from summer heat. Teachers from the city where the convention was held usually contributed a major share of the audience. Some classroom teachers took advantage of special railroad fares, but most of those who travelled to attend were administrators or publishers. They could often get their expenses paid by their school boards or companies.

The tone of these meetings was genteel. Open declaration of candidacy for offices was strictly taboo, but of course, if friends and colleagues mentioned one's name prominently, the result might well be election. The standard acceptance speech formula required the newly elected officer — especially president — to express complete surprise at the totally unsought, unexpected and undeserved honor. Elections were invariably unanimous in theory. When the nominating committee presented its slate, someone would move that it be adopted and "that the secretary be directed to cast the unanimous vote of the Association." The motion always carried even if everyone did not agree.[9]

A More Sophisticated Organization

In 1883 the NEA's officers took a step which greatly enlarged the scope of the organization. They noted that Thomas W. Bicknell, owner-

editor of the New England Journal of Education, had organized a highly successful meeting in 1877 for the American Institute of Instruction. They elected Bicknell president and gave him a free hand. He selected the small town of Madison, Wisconsin for the 1884 meeting. He negotiated attractive rates with the railroads, including an arrangement whereby the railroads paid a $2.00 membership fee for each ticket sold.

The railroads advertised the NEA and the Madison meeting. Bicknell lined up a high-powered program, including a few women speakers. Several thousand people poured into Wisconsin. When they left and the bills were paid, a cash balance of $3,000 remained. The nominating committee suggested that Bicknell serve another term as president, but he declined.[10]

The Madison meeting was the final step in establishing the NEA annual meeting as the place for an enterprising educator to see and hear — to be seen and heard. The fact that one could not openly campaign for the presidency did not prevent enterprising principals, and superintendents, from noticing the utility of holding that office. The recognition and publicity could be a real asset in securing a "call" to a better position — or in nailing down one already held. And, of course, anyone who could secure the annual convention for his city would make many friends among businessmen at home.

Thomas W. Bicknell also suggested in 1879 (and got inaugurated in 1880) an addition to the NEA structure which would prove controversial, even divisive in the long run. Called the "American Council of Education," its purpose was to establish "correct opinions on educational questions" and to combat and overthrow "heresies and false notions of education." Originally, it consisted of fifty-one members chosen by

the five departments (the Council, itself, became the fifth department).[11]

The exclusiveness of the Council was apparent to many by 1890. Its close ties with the Department of Superintendence, its semi self-perpetuating character, and its apparent domination of the nominating process for NEA offices led to charges that the NEA was being increasingly run by and for the benefit of a small clique of insiders. The fact that the Department of Superintendence began meeting separately from the parent body in that same year did not help to squelch these feelings. Dissidents said that the time had come for more democracy and openness. However, instead of moving in that direction, a very small number of "inner circle" people took the opposite direction and thereby set a time bomb for the inevitable fights to come.[12]

The Old Guard Ring

At the center of the inner circle — detractors called it a ring — was William Torrey Harris. In 1889 he was just beginning a seventeen year reign as U.S. Commissioner of Education. He had been active in the NEA since the 1870 Cleveland meeting and had served as president in 1875. It was after 1889, however that he became a dominating power.

For a decade and a half beginning in 1891, Harris, Nicholas Murray Butler, and a few allies controlled the association. Resentment flarred at the 1897 Milwaukee meeting. Against Harris' better judgment, the inner circle closed its grip instead of making concessions. As opposition increased, Harris — because of his own needs and personality — could not afford to follow an independent course of action. He had allowed himself to become the tool of special interests and spent the

last three years of his life an unhappy man.

The Character of William T. Harris

William Torrey Harris (1835-1909) was the oldest of nine children born on his grandfather's farm in North Killingly – a community of farms in the Northeast corner of Connecticut. His mother, Zilpah Torrey, was college educated, but his father (William Harris) apparently was not. The latter had a "chronic and impatient restlessness." He tried to run a dry goods store but failed. Another business venture with a relative came to nothing. From time to time he would travel West looking for a suitable farm, but he always lost money.[13]

It was in this atmosphere that young William grew up. He watched his father pretend to be a gentleman farmer on his grandfather's farm, while his mother worked hard and worry about money. He seems to have borrowed from his father's stock of attitudes and habits. He shrank from physical discomfort, such as being out in cold weather "not because I was not as tough [as a younger brother], or people said, b[illegible] because I lacked spunk or determination."[14] His schooling consisted [illegible] innumerable "fresh starts" most of which were begun with enthusiasm and all of which were not completed. He tried attending school in Providence (while living with a relative), but he did not do well and asked to return home. When he was thirteen he entered a nearby academy, the first of five which he would attend but from which he would not graduate. He spelled badly, had trouble with Latin, disliked math (and anything connected with memory work), and generally preferred daydreaming to work.[15]

After spending a winter working on the farm in 1853, William entered Phillips Academy at Andover to prepare for college. Instead of studying the assigned material, young Harris decided to strengthen his mind by reading "dry, uninteresting books" from his grandfather's library. The following fall he left Andover to teach a winter term of district school in Thompson, Connecticut. He lasted the eighty-nine day term, but it was not a successful venture.[15]

Just after he turned nineteen, Harris entered Yale. He still did not know how to study, and he did not mix well socially. To save money he decided to live on stale bread and apples (with frequent trips to the candy store); he was often sick. Most of his classmates thought he was odd and avoided him. The false eye, which he covered with a pair of glasses, probably did not improve things. (This was a result of his hitting a percussion cap with an axe on July 4, 1851.) Instead of learning Latin and Greek, Harris carried around a copy of Ollendorf's German Teacher. He also took up, in addition to phonography and vegetarianism, hydropathy, spiritualism, graphology, and phrenology. At the beginning of his second year at Yale, Harris rented a gymnasium in town hoping to make money. He lost about $200 instead. At Christmas the following year he withdrew, but he had quit going to classes before that.

In 1857 William borrowed $100 from his grandmother. He and a college friend, Robert Seney Moore of New York, went to St. Louis to meet William's father who was on one of his several farm prospecting trips. The elder Harris finally met the boys in St. Louis. He had lost his money through "bad luck" on the trip, so he was headed back to Connecticut without having acquired his farm.

William and Robert Moore stayed on in St. Louis hoping to become wealthy. Robert spent his time going to the theater; William spent his dreaming up a hundred schemes for making a fortune. He kept a diary in which he recorded many of these plans. "By and by I too shall become a great man, or, rather on a high standpoint," he confided to it on March 14, 1858. Less than a month later he wrote:

> I no sooner commence a great course of things which would be heroic could I only finish them, then, lo, something, quite unexpected turns up and I am left, or rather the projected things are left, in the lurch.[16]

Moore's parents finally called him back to New York. William's mother continued to suggest that he take up teaching. Between fantasies of becoming a gentleman farmer and schemes to get rich selling fountain pens, Harris did appear before Ira Divoll, who had just been elected Superintendent of Schools in St. Louis, to apply for a teaching position. Harris' modest demeanor and statement that he had been to Yale impressed Divoll. Out of the interview Harris got a job tutoring the son of a well-to-do family. This terminated, however, after it became apparent that the boy was not learning much.[17]

In March 1858, Harris was offered a job, on a trial basis, teaching Greek in the prep department of Washington University. He bought a new coat and looked forward to becoming a renowned professor of Greek. Since he knew almost no Greek, however, and could not control the boys, he was dismissed without pay after two weeks.[18]

A month after Harris' career as a professor of Greek ended, Ira Divoll gave him a job as assistant teacher in Franklin Grammar School. The following fall Divoll put Harris in charge of a new grammar school. At Christmas Harris went back to Connecticut to marry Sarah Tully

Bugbe, a girl whom he had courted before going to St. Louis.

Marriage and a steady job were apparently good for Harris. It is difficult to know how successful he was in running his grammar school. In any case his work satisfied Divoll, and he apparently applied himself to his job with more consistency than he had done before. He continued to dabble at shorthand, philosophy, and languages. He said he studied Sunskrit, Hebrew, ancient and modern Greek, Danish, Italian, Portuguese, German, and Dutch, and he "strengthened his memory" by trying to memorize sentences in a French grammar text. He probably learned more German than any of the others, but even in German he never developed much facility. He bought books, especially books on languages other than English, and had them specially bound. Throughout his life Harris took great comfort from acquiring additions to his library. He didn't find it necessary to read the books to derive benefit from them.[19]

The year 1858 was significant in Harris' life. He not only got married and secured a job in the St. Louis schools, but he also met Henry Conrad Brokmeyer, an emigrant from Westphalia who eventually held several political offices in Missouri before retiring to live with the Indian in Oklahoma. In 1858 Brokmeyer withdrew to a cabin in the Missouri woods, where Harris paid him to translate Hegel's Logik.[20]

Brokmeyer's insights and translations of Hegel gave Harris the spring-board jump he needed into philosophy.[21] Harris' connections in the small St. Louis philosophical group gave him the opportunity to arrange several lectures for A. Bronson Alcott. Since Alcott's livelihood came from the honoraria he gathered on lecture tours, he appreciated Harris' help in St. Louis. In return, he introduced Harris to Emerson and several other

New England literary figures, helped him get subscriptions for The Journal of Speculative Philosophy (started by Harris in 1866), and engaged Harris as a lecturer from 1879 to 1888 in his "Summer School of Philosophy" at Concord, Massachusetts.[22]

The Civil War disrupted schooling in St. Louis, but after it was over enrollments grew rapidly. Mrs. Divoll's health was not good and Harris was always available to lend a helping hand. In 1867 Divoll went South to try to recuperate from one of his recurring attacks of yellow fever. He left Harris in charge of the schools. Harris wrote the annual report. Finally, Divoll resigned and strongly supported the thirty-two year old Harris for the position. Harris then helped Divoll wage a successful campaign for State Superintendent of Schools in Missouri.[23]

For twelve years (1868-1880) Harris headed the schools of St. Louis. It has generally been assumed that he was a strong, democratic leader. His annual reports circulated widely and were well regarded. Susan Blow and others started kindergartens which the school system — under strong pressure from the large St. Louis German community — took over. The St. Louis period in Harris' career has never been adequately researched and reported, but there are some indications that Harris was not as effective a leader as later people generally assumed. Harris was suspected in some quarters of being too friendly to railroad interests in disposing of some school lands. He angered the German community over several issues, and in 1878 there was a textbook scandal. Also in 1878, teachers' salaries were cut, and Harris consoled them with a talk on "The Proper Care of the Brain." The St. Louis Globe-Democrat called this speech "a psychopathic homily in two parts — part one transcendental, lasting an

hour; and part two practical, about ten minutes."[24] Feelings were sufficiently strong in 1877 to cause Harris to allow his name to be put forward in opposition to John D. Philbrick for the superintendency in Boston. The Boston Sunday Herald caricatured Harris on a throne ruling the St. Louis schools and school board like a monarch. He lost the bid against Philbrick and by 1880 decided to retire from St. Louis rather than risk being forced out.[25]

Alcott's Summer School of Philosophy, to which Harris and his family repaired in 1880, promised to be an exciting venture and attracted large crowds at first. In 1882 Alcott suffered a stroke and Emerson died. Attendance rapidly declined after that and the school closed in 1888. Harris had an income from a series of school readers that he and Andrew J. Rickoff had put together in the 1870's, but he was definitely in the market for a job and luck was with him. The U.S. Bureau of Education had been filled from 1886 to 1889 by N. H. R. Dawson, an Alabama Democrat, but the election in 1888 of Republican Benjamin Harrison signalled a change. Harris was apparently suggested as a possibility by President Harrison's new Secretary of the Interior, John W. Noble. Noble was from St. Louis and had been a friend of Harris' there. His association with Emerson and Alcott lent prestige as well. Educational publicist A. E. Winship came out for Harris in his widely read Journal of Education. Colonel Francis W. Parker of the Cook County Normal School wired his support of Harris.[26]

In early August 1889, Harris received the appointment as Winship had predicted he would, and he was ecstatic. "If I can be United States Commissioner of Education, even for one day," he told Winship when they

first discussed the possibility, "I shall feel like saying ,'Now letttest they servant depart in peace.' It is the recognition that I desire."[27] As it turned out, one day was not quite enough for Harris.

Both of Harris' immediate predecessors as Commissioner of Education (John Eaton, 1870-1886, N. H. R. Dawson, 1886-1889) had been good organizers and able administrators. They had cooperated heartily with school people and had maintained close ties with the NEA, but neither had used the office to increase their personal popularity. With Harris, it was a different story.

From the beginning Harris saw the appointment as the country's recognition of him as an intellectual leader. Under Eaton and Dawson, when correspondents sent queries to the Commissioner, they received whatever factual information the Bureau had on the subject. Under Harris, they usually received a reprint of one or more of Harris' articles and a letter detailing his experience and beliefs. Office morale gradually deteriorated. Those who saw Harris as "our great chief" got preferred treatment. He viewed the thirty-eight clerks and laborers more as personal secretaries and servants than as professionals with jobs to do.[28]

The immediate effect was that Harris' name became better known in school circles. He received more speaking invitations than he could accept, and he accepted a great many at that. He had never been noted for giving dynamic papers, but people at least listened with respect now.[29] Also, universities — important ones to Harris — bestowed honorary doctorates. The University of Missouri had made him "Doctor" Harris in 1870 (honoris causa) but now Brown granted an honorary Ph.D. (1893), and

Pennsylvania, Yale and Princeton followed suit with LL.D.'s (1896-98). Finally, the University of Jena granted an honorary Ph.D. in 1899. "This is what signifies," he told friends.[30]

Harris and the NEA

Harris had joined the NEA in 1870, and he remained active. The NEA was good to him. He spoke often at meetings and was an active member of the rather exclusive Council of Education from its founding (1880). When two thousand teachers applauded him (as the new Commissioner of Education) at the St. Paul meeting in 1890, he certainly would have rejected the notion that he was a part of any ring, clique, or old guard. He regarded himself as democratic, open, and progressive. He was not anti-feminist or reactionary, and he was glad that large numbers of teachers came to the meetings.[31] However, that was in 1890, when he knew Nicholas Murray Butler only slightly. By 1900 they were close, and Harris' relationships within the NEA were changing.

The Rise of Nicholas Murray Butler

Murray Butler (his childhood name) was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1862 into a family which had high hopes for him. His maternal grandfather was Dr. Nicholas Murray, the "Presbyterian Pope." His father Henry Leny Butler was an English emigrant, a small textile merchant. They moved to Paterson, New Jersey, where young Murray grew up in a small but growing industrial town.[32]

From childhood his parents expected a high level of performance and generally got it. Paterson's schools were not the best but this young man excelled anyway. His father's being president of the school board

may have helped the teachers recognize and encourage his special academic talents. He graduated from high school at the age of thirteen, but then had to be tutored for college.

His father's income was insufficient to send him to Princeton or Williams, so he lived in Brooklyn with his step grandfather and attended Columbia. His classmates regarded him as a "bunyanker" — one out to secure honors — and he was. He was precocious, confident, aggressive, boundlessly energetic and sometimes pompously egotistical. He was the young man most likely to succeed, and he did.

When he graduated at twenty, he had an impressive list of prizes and honors, a three year scholarship for graduate study, a thousand dollars in the bank, and supreme confidence that he could do anything. He had also caught the eye of Columbia President F. A. P. Barnard who decided to make an educational leader of Butler.

Graduate study in philosophy came as easily to Butler as everything else had. He finished an M.A. in one year and a Ph.D. in one more. In the summer between, he travelled up to Concord, Massachusetts to hear William Torrey Harris lecture. After graduating he spent a year split between Berlin and Paris doing post-doctoral study before starting his career on the Columbia faculty.

From 1895 to the early 1890's, Butler worked his way from a temporary, sometimes unpaid, position as assistant in the Philosophy Department at Columbia to Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and President of the newly created Teacher's College. He also became increasingly active behind the scenes in New Jersey and New York state and city politics. He became an advisor to New York Governor Theodore Roosevelt, who dubbed him

Nicholas "Miraculous" Butler, and he became active in the NEA.

The Harris-Butler Combination

Butler and Harris had a natural affinity. Butler always gravitated to the people who counted and Harris had a reputation in two of his major areas of interest — philosophy and education.[33] Harris, on the other hand, liked Butler. He was in so many ways the man Harris had wanted to become: poised, socially comfortable, an academic whiz, a polished speaker, an effective organizer, and always self-assured. When Butler met Harris in the early eighties, the relationship was that of student to teacher. By 1891 they were equals, and by 1895 sixty-year-old Harris was often asking thirty-three-year-old Butler for "fraternal" advice.

Harris sought and got Butler's help in 1891 to put into operation "round table" at the Toronto meeting of the NEA. This was Butler's introduction to the inner workings of the organization, and he immediately saw possibilities. With Harris' help, he got $2,500 earmarked for a committee to examine secondary education and was instrumental in choosing its membership. This was the famous "Committee of Ten" which Harvard President Charles Eliot chaired.[34]

Harris served on the Committee of Ten and was very impressed with the favorable attention its first report attracted in 1893. During the same year with Butler's support the U.S. Commissioner secured money for and became chairman of a Committee of Fifteen to do for elementary education what Eliot's committee had done for secondary schools. In 1894, while Harris was hard at work on his report, he supported Butler for president of the association, while Butler lobbied for Harris in Washington

so that the new Democratic administration would not replace him as Commissioner. The world looked good to Harris.[35]

Shortly after this, in the Winter of 1895, Harris learned that things were not quite as he had supposed. Harris had invested a great deal of energy and ego into his part ("Correlation of Studies") of the Committee of Fifteen report. He thought he had caught the spirit of the Committee of Ten report and extended it to the elementary schools. When the report was aired at the February 1895 meeting of the Department of Superintendence, Harris was shocked at its reception. The Herbartians and representatives of the "new education" attacked it. Eliot, who Harris hoped would be pleased, was not interested. Nor did Butler support him — much to his surprise and chagrin. The Commissioner took the entire incident very personally and was hurt and confused.[36]

The episode was complicated by another dimension. Harris got so caught up in the whole project that he had the Bureau print and distribute gratuitously 30,000 copies of the Committee of Ten report. He was planning 50,000 copies of the Report of the Committee of Fifteen. However, the American Book Company intended to publish both reports and pay the NEA a royalty. They brought pressure to stop Harris, but he was oblivious at first. In the meantime, Butler (who had ABC friends) and one of the Committee of Fifteen members, New York City Superintendent William Maxwell, thwarted Harris by offering to have Butler's Educational Review set the report in galleys and circulate these to all other interested educational journals. Harris had told editors that they could print as much as they wanted of the report, but when journals received the galleys, they found that the Educational Review had put a copyright notice on it.[37]

Harris found himself in the unpleasant position of having to defend Maxwell and Butler as "unselfish" to the educational press while seeing his cherished hopes for the Committee of Fifteen report go down, partly at the hands of those he was defending.

The whole episode was a bitter experience for Harris. He was ill for a time. He decided not to go to the 1895 Denver NEA meeting at which Butler would preside. Instead, he took his family to Europe.[38]

In retrospect, it appears that the 1895 incident removed Harris' last illusion that he could operate independently of Butler. Had Harris been different in character and temperament, he might well have either confronted or outmaneuvered Butler letting the chips fall as they might. But he was not tempermentally equipped to outflank his young friend, and he wanted his job too badly to risk opposing a man whose power was rapidly increasing. Harris' ambitious nature had always relied more on cultivating friendships with the right people than upon his own competence. He would not change now. From 1896 until Butler arranged for him to resign in 1906, Harris sought and had his support and friendship. In return, Harris supported and defended Butler to the best of his ability in everything that he did.[39]

Butler and the NEA

Nicholas Murray Butler brought the same approach to the NEA that he brought to everything else with which he involved himself. He had a strong belief in social Darwinism. The "fit" group of intelligent leaders in the world was growing more intelligent and less numerous. The rest of the population was gaining numerically and losing intellectually.[40]

Butler's whole experience verified the ease with which most people could be led and manipulated. It was not inconsistent, therefore, to remove power from those who would abuse it, including the masses, and put it in the hands of those who were virtuous and who knew best. This was precisely what Butler tried to do for the NEA.

Butler began his reform with tact, confidence, a skillful use of parliamentary procedure, and the help of several allies on the Board of Directors. At the 1894 Directors' meeting, with President Butler in the chair, F. A. Fitzpatrick (American Book Company representative, then in Nebraska and later from Boston) offered four resolutions which Chairman Butler explained and the Board approved. In fact, though not in theory, the resolution replaced the Board of Directors as the chief governing body of the association by an "Executive Committee." The committee consisted of the NEA president, immediate past president, secretary, treasurer, and chairman of the four person Board of Trustees.

In order for these resolutions to become amendments, they had to be voted upon by a general business meeting of the association. At the 1895 Denver meeting, President Butler had the resolutions read as proposed amendments and tabled. The next day at a noon meeting, when many people had left (and those who had not wanted to), the President took the amendments from the table, explained them briefly, called for a voice vote, and declared them adopted.[41]

In addition to establishing the Executive Committee as specified in the Board of Directors' resolution, the amendments also changed the Board of Directors make-up. There would still be one director from each state or territory and all the people and organizations that had "life

directorships" (by paying $100) would keep them. In the future no new life directors could be secured, but all past and future presidents would be life directors. Also, presiding officers of the departments would no longer be members of the Board of Directors, except for the president of the Council of Education. Another feature of the amendments was that membership would now be in three classes: honorary, active, and associate. New active members would need to pay a $2.00 enrollment fee in addition to the $2.00 annual fee. This was to keep "mere excursionists" out of the meetings, said the Columbia professor.

For the year 1896, Butler enlisted Harris' support (and other people's as well) to have Newton C. Dougherty, Superintendent of Schools in Peoria, Illinois, elected president. Dougherty would figure prominently in Butler's NEA plans for the next ten years.[42]

At the 1896 Buffalo meeting of the Board of Directors, Chairman Newton Dougherty announced that the Executive Committee (on which Dougherty and Butler both served) was nominating Butler to finish the term of the late N. A. Calkins of New York on the Board of Trustees. Director Skinner (of New York) moved that the secretary be directed to "cast the unanimous ballot of this Board for Dr. Butler." It was done.[43]

At the same meeting Louis F. Soldan, Harris' friend and successor in St. Louis, announced the nominating committee's choice of Charles R. Skinner of New York for next year's president. Skinner appointed Harris, Dougherty, and Tarbell to be a committee to name new members to the National Council of Education. Five of the seven people named "succeeded themselves."[44]

At the 1898 Saturday noon meeting, President J. M. Greenwood, Superintendent of Schools in Kansas City, recognized Butler who presented and explained at length the need for an amendment making further changes in the arrangement of officers. The changes were: 1) that the four member Board of Trustees be declared the "body corporate" with power to hire and fix the compensation of a permanent secretary and 2) that the U.S. Commissioner be added to the Executive Committee. The secretary was approved, but dissatisfaction was building, and a move by A. S. Downing, Carroll Pearse, and others blocked the amendment which would automatically place the U.S. Commissioner of Education on the Executive Committee. Harris was selected later in the afternoon by the Board of Directors to be on the Executive Council for a one-year term.[45]

Butler continued his consolidation moves, but resistance increased. Harris did his best to allay suspicion, although in 1901 criticism began flaring openly.[46] Harris was decreasingly effective in countering the opposition. He dismissed the criticisms as "hysterical" when they came from the convention floor, but loyal NEA supporters like John Eaton and E. E. White were not amused by Harris.

Harris offended a number of the "old hands" in the NEA by trying to secretly thwart a move to upgrade the Bureau of Education into a Department. Dissatisfaction with his performance as Commissioner increased and so did irritation over the Butler dominated NEA.[47]

By 1905, when Butler made his final consolidation move (by securing a Federal charter for the NEA), Harris was no longer effective. He inadvertently got in the way of lobby efforts for the Federal charter.

Harris was not the only friendly NEA liability on the Columbia President's (since 1902) hands in 1905. More spectacularly embarrassing was Newton Dougherty. Butler and Dougherty were very closely identified. Butler handpicked him for NEA President in 1895. In giving him the gavel, Butler called him "the gentleman whose intimate personal friendship I have long enjoyed. It is particularly interesting," the outgoing President added, "for me to remember that it was through your invitation that I first became a member of this association." Dougherty responded by calling his friend's year in the presidency "peerless in the history of this association."[48] By 1900 Dougherty had joined his colleague on the elite four member Board of Trustees, charged with the direct oversight of all the association's money.

Back in Peoria, Illinois, Dougherty was a pillar of the community. Superintendent of Schools, Secretary of the School Board, President of the Peoria National Bank, he had many friends. He dressed well, gave to charities, went to church, and was a favorite in dinner party circles. His Eastern friends and his NEA prominence lent credibility in Peoria.

Then, it happened. In October 1905 a grand jury – called for another purpose – investigated charges of irregularities brought by a man who had worked in Dougherty's bank. Dougherty's friends welcomed the investigation, hotly denying any possibility of wrong. Investigators discovered forged school vouchers, approved by Dougherty as Secretary and paid by Dougherty's bank. One revelation after another followed including: that the Superintendent had presented forged credentials in 1879 to get his job; and that he had used forged offers of better positions to get raises. As a result, a run on the Peoria National Bank caused it to close.[49]

Dougherty denied all for a time, but finally had to plead guilty to the indictments he knew could be proved. He had apparently stolen a great deal of money – not less than $75,000 and perhaps as much as $1,000,000 – but he had lost most of it in bad investments. The educational community was shocked at the news. Dougherty insisted to Butler, who apparently believed him, that he was guilty of nothing more than bad bookkeeping.

The Changing of the Guard

A few months after Dougherty went to prison, Butler got the recently founded Carnegie Corporation for the Advancement of Teaching to offer Harris a $3,000 annual retirement stipend. Harris checked with Butler and resigned immediately.[50]

Friends and relatives expected Harris to work on some of the many projects he had said he wanted to do. One of his brothers tried to get him to write an introduction for the manuscript of Brokmeyer's translation of Hegel's Larger Logic, but Harris could never feel well enough to do it. Despite constant attention from his wife and daughter, he told another brother that he was "often overcome by loneliness," and that only his 12,000 books – especially the dictionaries of oriental languages – comforted him.[51]

In 1908 Harris went to the Cleveland NEA meeting, but came home very tired. The following summer he said he did not feel well enough to go to the Denver meeting. Nicholas Murray Butler had a telegram of greetings sent and Harris replied:

Doctor Nicholas Murray Butler
c/o National Education Association
My heartfelt thanks for the kind words of remembrance
from you and all the dear old friends. Give my love
to the National Educational Association corporately
and individually.[52]

Four months later, Harris died at Providence, Rhode Island. The following summer at the Boston meeting, for the first time in NEA history, the nominating committee's report would not be adopted.

NOTES

1. Edgar B. Wesley, NEA: The First Hundred Years (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1957), pp. 21-23; Mildred S. Fenner, "The National Education Association, 1892-1942," Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, The George Washington University, 1942, p. 20.

2. Wesley, p. 23.

3. Ibid., pp. 25-26.

4. Mary A. Burrough to [Margaret Haley], 25 June 1910, Box 40, Chicago Teachers' Federation Files, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.

5. Wesley, p. 32, quotes J.D. Philbrick as remembering that about 1100 people enrolled at the meeting. Fenner, NEA History (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1950), p. 155, estimates membership at 187 for the year.

6. Wesley, p. 35; Fenner, NEA History, p. 155.

7. The two agencies remained close until the 1960s when they both changed in important ways.

8. Fenner, "The National Education Association, 1892-1942," p. 22.

9. See the minutes of each year's meeting in the appropriate NEA Proceedings.

10. Wesley, pp. 256-61.

11. Ibid., pp. 262-63; Kurt F. Leidecker, Yankee Teacher: The life of William Torrey Harris (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1946), pp. 523-24. says Harris concurred in the idea.

12. Wesley, p. 283. Several letters in Harris' 1890 "Outgoing Correspondence" refer to problems in veiled terms. Harris wrote John Eaton, 5 May 1890, that a North Carolina move to "break away from the National Association" would only hurt for the first year. Record Group 12, Microfilmed "Outgoing Correspondence of the Commissioner of Education," National Archives of the United States, Reel 60, Frames 189-90.

13. There is no satisfactory biography of Harris. Kurt Leidecker had access to all of Harris' personal papers and his resulting Yankee Teacher contains a great many details not to be found elsewhere, but he has arranged the data to fit his presumption that Harris was a "philosophical giant" and a "great man."

14. Letter from Harris to his mother, c.1856, quoted in Leidecker, p. 54.

15. Details from Harris' early life are from Leidecker, pp. 18-20, 31, 36-37, 39-47, 55-60, 68-83, 104-05,620.

16. Ibid., pp. 130-31.

17. Harris spent half of his first $50 monthly fee (for tutoring Henry O'Fallon) on phonography books and had Henry read to him so he could practice his shorthand. Leidecker, pp. 95-97.

18. Harris wrote in his diary, 13 April 1858, that he was as "extravagant as a March hare! Money slips through my fingers as fast as water....Well, I must shut down on my extravagance as soon as I have spent my next 50 dollars." Leidecker, p. 625.

19. Ibid., pp. 188-89.

20. Ibid., pp. 316-22. Harris apparently continued buying Brokmeyer's translations for many years (Leidecker, p. 548). He published Hegel's Logic (D. Appleton and Co., 1890), but when his brother offered him $1000 in 1908 to edit and write an introduction to Brokmeyer's translation of Hegel's Larger Logic, Harris found many reasons to stall and not do the work. See twenty-five letters between David Harris and William Torrey Harris, 2 January 1908 to 16 August 1909, William Torrey Harris Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

21. Denton J. Snider, The St. Louis Movement in Philosophy, Literature, Education and Psychology, with Chapters of Autobiography (1920), details the St. Louis Philosophical movement. In 1876, Harris joined the St. Louis Society of Useful Knowledge, Mrs. John W. Noble, President. Mrs. Noble's husband would later help Harris be named Commissioner of Education. Leidecker, pp. 314,635.

22. Seventy-six letters between 22 December 1857 and 16 October 1881 from Alcott to Harris are contained in Richard L. Hernstadt, ed., The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1969).

23. Leidecker, pp. 162-81, 245-51.

24. Leidecker, (pp. 241-93) takes the position that Harris was very successful as superintendent and that opposition to him was from a few reactionary and self- interested groups; Harris' later administrative style in the Bureau of Education, along with the numerous problems briefly alluded to by Leidecker (and Bernard J. Kolbrenner, "William T. Harris, Superintendent of Schools, St. Louis Missouri," unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1942), raise serious doubt. Claude A. Phillips, A History of Education in Missouri (Jefferson City, Missouri: The Hugh Stephens Printing Company, 1911), p. 230, praises Harris' superintendency, but says the school system "had been at a standstill for some time" before Harris resigned.

25. Boston Sunday Herald, 19 August 1877; Leidecker, pp. 380-82; p. 343: "From 1873 till Harris left the city[in 1880], a veritable barrage of insinuations flooded the newspaper editors' desks, one more absurd than the other. Probably the jealous mind of an unsuccessful Board member conceived of calling Harris 'an absolute king'...."

26. Ibid., pp. 456-61; Leonard Glenn Smith, "A History of the United States Office of Education, 1867-1967," microfilmed Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1967, pp. 89-91.

27. Quoted in Isaac Miles Wright, "History of the United States Bureau of Education," microfilmed D. Ped. thesis, New York University, 1916, p. 42.

28. For background on the U. S. Office of Education, see Donald R. Warren, To Enforce Education: A History of the Founding Years of the United States Office of Education (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974), pp. 98-166; cf. Smith, pp. 1-88. Harris' activities and attitudes as Commissioner are voluminously documented in the National Archives microfilmed letterpress from Record Group 12, Reels 25-52, 60-69. Harris invariably ordered one to three thousand reprints of any article he had published and had the Bureau pay the bill.

29. Leidecker (p. 331) notes that in 1875 when Harris gave the commencement address at the Cincinnati Normal School: "The audience left, first in little squads till their number swelled into a 'steady column of retreaters,' to return only for the music and the awarding of the diplomas." The same author notes that at the Concord Summer School "anyone having heard him merely on the platform might have carried away many disappointments" (p. 416).

30. A. E. Winship, "Educators as I Have Known Them -- United States Commissioners of Education," Journal of Education, 18 May 1916, p. 541.

31. Leidecker, pp. 523-24.

32. Information about Butler's life and career, except for his NEA activities, is taken chiefly from Richard Whittemore, Nicholas Murray Butler and Public Education, 1862-1911 (New York: Teachers College Press 1970). A disappointing work is Sister M. A. Healey's "The Educational Philosophy of Nicholas Murray Butler and Its Relevance for Contemporary Problems in Education," microfilmed (UM # 67-07326) Ph.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1967.

33. Butler's Across the Busy Years: Recollections and Reflections, 2 Vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939) amply documents his proclivity for meeting the right people.

34. Harris to George P. Brown, 5 March 1892, to Butler, 5 March 1891, to W. R. Garrett, 9 March 1891, Reel 28, Frames 197-98, 205, 265-66; Harris to Butler, 28 May 1896, Reel 34, Frame 59, microfilm of Record Group 12, National Archives. See also NEA Proceedings, 1891, p. 32, and Edward A. Krug, The Shaping of the American High School, 1880-1920 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 18-92.

35. Leidecker, pp. 470-71; 514.

36. Harris to E. E. White, 7 March, to C. W. Bardeen, 7 March, to W. H. Maxwell, 8 March, 9 April, to N. A. Calkins, 25 March, to Charles W. Eliot, 27 March, to B. A. Hinsdale, 4 April, to George P. Brown, 4 April, 21 June 1895, Reel 60, Frames 456-57, 454-55, 458-59, 506, 473-75, 479-80, 493-94, 489-92, 581-83, microfilm of Record Group 12, National Archives.

37. Harris to Butler, 21 March, 5, 6 April 1895, Reel 60, Frames 469-72, 495-500, microfilm of Record Group 12, National Archives.

38. Harris to Butler, 31 January, 15 April, to George Trumbull Ladd, 25 May 1895, Reel 60, Frames 402-403, 495-500, 567-68, microfilm of Record Group 12, National ARchives.

39. See letters from Harris to Butler in Record Group 12. Harris wrote Herbart Baxter Adams, 3 June 1899, that "Columbia University is the one university that I must not slight under any circumstances." Reel 61, Frames 351-53, microfilm Record Group 12, National Archives.

40. See "The Competent and the Crowd," by Gustave LeBon, trans. from L'Opinion and run as an editorial in Butler's Educational Review 40 (June 1910): 1-10.

41. NEA Proceedings, 1894, p. 43, 1895, pp. 22-24.

42. Harris to Butler, 6 September 1895, Reel 60, Frames 592-96: "Mr. Dougherty is an admirable man for president."

43. NEA Proceedings, 1896, p. 34.

44. Ibid., p. 24.

45. Ibid., 1898, pp. 29,39. The Directors' vote was Harris-20, Pearse-11. Harris was elected every year until 1906.

46. "National Educational Association," Journal of Education, 28 February1901, pp. 131-34.

47. Butler trampled White's comments about honoring the NEAs constitution. NEA Proceedings, 1900, pp. 26-29. At the February 1900 meeting of the Department of Superintendence, Harris had disgusted White by arranging in advance to have the Chair ignore White who wanted to present a resolution about the Bureau. See Harris to White, 23 March 1900, Reel 60, Frames 515-18 and 15 January 1901, Reel 61, Frames 495-98, microfilm of Record Group 12, National Archives.

48. NEA Proceedings, 1895, p. 36.

49. The unfolding of the Dougherty story is contained in almost daily articles in the Peoria Star, October and November, 1905. The Dougherty-Butler Correspondence (c. 350 letters) in the Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University Archives, document their relationship and the Dougherty "defalcation."

50. Smith, pp. 105-09.

51. Quoted in Leidecker, p. 595.

52. Ibid., p. 593.